

# Evaluating Print Sources

## STUDENT OBJECTIVES

- Evaluate the credibility of print sources
- Evaluate the credibility of information within print sources

## RESOURCES AND PREPARATION

You will need photocopies for students of:

- **Student Lesson Summary**, p. 561
- **Teaching Model:** *The Plains Indians*, p. 563
- **Practice Worksheets**, Levels A and B, pp. 564–566
- **Reteaching Worksheet**, p. 567

## Teach

1. **Evaluating Print Sources:** Explain that the quality of a print source can vary as widely as that of a consumer product. Readers must evaluate print information sources just as consumers evaluate products. Write this example on the board.

### EXAMPLE

Laptop computer \$29.99 (plus shipping and handling fees)

Fully and completely guaranteed A+ Computers, Inc.

- Ask students if this looks like a good deal offered by a reputable company. (*no*) Ask why they might doubt the credibility of this source. (*the price is unrealistic; the company is not well known; the fees are not specified; “fully and completely guaranteed” is a vague blanket statement that is meant to persuade*)
- Explain that when students do research, they can consider whether a print source looks reputable by examining elements such as the author and publisher, bias, reliability, currency, and coverage. Then they can evaluate, or judge the quality of, the source.

2. **Teaching Evaluating Print Sources:** Distribute the **Lesson Summary** and review the **Academic Vocabulary**. Then introduce the questions in **Here's How**. Discuss these points:

- **Reliability:** Point out that some sources have a reputation for reliability. For example, a national newspaper is likely to be factual and provide a balanced view; therefore, it is generally considered reliable. A tabloid magazine, however, does not have a reputation for being factual and balanced. Ask students if a pamphlet issued by a group called People for Proposition 1208 would be a reliable source on the proposed law Proposition 1208. (*Not necessarily; the group has taken a stand in favor of the proposed law, so it is biased.*)
- **Currency:** Emphasize that up-to-date information is very important for some subjects, like technology and health, but may be less important for other subjects, such as history and literature. Ask: If you were researching a report on law that protect wetlands today, would a book published in 1983 be a good choice? (*no; it would likely be outdated*) What might be a better choice? (*more recently published books; newspapers, journals, and other periodicals*)
- **Coverage:** Tell students that it is important to find out what a source covers. Ask: If you were writing a report on the origins of the Gold Rush, where in a book

## EVALUATING PRINT SOURCES, CONTINUED

would you look to see if it covered that topic? (*table of contents; index; summary on back cover or flaps*)

**3. Guided Practice:** Distribute the **Teaching Model: *The Plains Indians*** and help students apply the **Here's How** steps to the nonfiction book example. As you discuss how to assess a book's credibility before reading it, you may want to highlight these points:

- **Reliability:** Explain that reliable reference books have often been reviewed by experts in the field. Have students read the blurbs (excerpts from reviews) on the back cover of *The Plains Indians*. Ask: Has *The Plains Indians* been reviewed by experts? (*yes*) Mention that complete reviews may be available online or in the *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature*.
- **Author and Publisher:** Have a volunteer read the author credentials on the copyright page. Ask: Does this author seem to be well qualified? (*yes*) Has the author written other books on the same topic? (*Yes, they are listed opposite the title page.*) Does the publisher seem to be trustworthy? (*Yes, the publisher is a university press.*)
- **Currency:** Remind students that the copyright page tells year of publication. Ask: What is the copyright date of *The Plains Indians*? (*2005*) Is that current enough for the topic? (*yes*)
- **Coverage:** Ask students whether the information provided seems to be comprehensive and in-depth. (*Yes, the Table of Contents, the beginning of the Foreword, and the sample text page ["In a Plains Village"] suggest that the coverage is likely to be in-depth.*)
- **Bias:** Have a volunteer read aloud the Foreword and the sample text page ("In a Plains Village"). Ask whether the book seems to give a balanced point of view. (*yes*) Explain that although bias can occur in almost any book, it often occurs when the aim is to persuade. Is that the purpose here? (*No, here the purpose seems to be to inform.*)
- **Usefulness:** Remind students that after they have assessed a book's credibility, they should consider whether it is relevant to their research goal. Ask: Would *The Plains Indians* be relevant if your research goal was to learn about traditional types of Plains villages? (*Yes; the sample text page mentions this topic.*) Would it be relevant if your goal was to learn about Plains Indians today? (*No, the Foreword says it gives an overview of 1700–1900.*)
- **Information:** Ask students how they would evaluate the credibility of information within a source. (*Try to see if the author has a bias; watch out for loaded or vague language; check what kind of sources the author used; check whether the information is current.*)

**QUICK CHECK.** Ask students to name the five factors they should consider when evaluating a print source. (*reliability, author/publisher, currency, coverage, and bias*)

## Practice and Apply

Activities involving evaluating print sources appear on pp. 564–566.

- Assign **Practice Worksheet A** to students who need more structured activities.
- Assign **Practice Worksheet B** to grade-level and above-level students.

### Answer Key: Practice Worksheet A

1. *a*    2. *b*    3. *a*    4. *b*

### Sample Answers: Practice Worksheet B

1. *The author's background as a celebrated physician suggests that this is a reliable source. We can assume the author knows the subject well.*
2. *The word Failed in the subtitle shows the article's bias.*
3. *The publisher, a professional medical journal, suggests the article is credible.*
4. *The article is credible because the author uses verifiable facts and statistics. Nonetheless, the article has a strong bias that must be taken into account.*

## Assess and Reteach

Use these guidelines to determine if students need the **Reteaching Worksheet**.

- **Practice Worksheet A:** Students should correctly answer three of the four questions.
- **Practice Worksheet B:** Students should answer three of the four questions with answers similar to the samples.

For students who need reteaching, review the **Lesson Summary**. Use the **Teaching Model** to illustrate items in the chart. Then have students complete the **Reteaching Worksheet**, p. 567.

### Answer Key: Reteaching Worksheet

1. *b*
2. *c*
3. *a, b*
4. *Sample: This source is biased against nuclear power. Although the author probably knows a lot about nuclear power, he is not a recognized expert in the field. The author likely will not present a balanced picture of this power source.*